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Our opinion

The A to F of recycling

It's amazing that some cities and towns can do a terrific job of recycling—most communities statewide are in that group—while others can't seem to get their act together.

The majority of towns south of Boston are boosting the amount of refuse recycled each year and keeping pace with the state target, which is 34 percent of trash this year. Several towns in the region were at or above what the state considers A-level—Milton, Cohasset, Hingham, Marshfield, Norwood and Duxbury. That was double last year's number.

Then there were the failures, the Fs. For the second straight year Carver, Hull and Randolph didn't even bother to file paperwork with the state. That's disgraceful, and it also shortchanges residents in those towns, because communities that do well are eligible for state grants to purchase recycling equipment.

Stoughton was one of several stand-out towns. Its recycling rate went from 4 percent to 24 percent in a year, and the reward was a grant of \$72,110. Plymouth also did well, jumping from 3 to 22 percent, and Pembroke went from 8 to 28 percent.

That makes us wonder what's happening in towns such as Rockland, Hanson, Avon and Whitman, all at 15 percent or below. Rockland recycles

just 7 percent of its waste.

Recycling doesn't necessarily come easy. It's a house-by-house, family-by-family effort. On the other hand, how difficult is it to bundle newspapers and separate glass bottles and plastics from garbage?

Kids are crucial to the recycling effort. They are the first line of defense against smoking because of educational efforts in school. And the same emphasis should be put on recycling.

It's not just a question of reusing materials and helping contain depletion of the earth's resources. It's also a question of dollars and cents. Every city and town is running out of landfill space; capping old landfills and preparing new ones, or shipping waste out of town, is costly business. Every homeowner pays for that in property taxes.

In Milton, the cause-effect aspect of recycling is very evident. The town gives out 52 garbage stickers for each weekly trash pickup. If there is more trash, homeowners pay for additional stickers. Not surprisingly, Milton's recycling rate is higher than any other community south of Boston.

Overall, progress in recycling more trash has been remarkable in just a few years. But the number of towns with poor to failing grades indicates that much work remains to be done.